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ABSTRACT

Mentoring programs designed to assist beginning teachers have become commonplace in today's public school. However, little has been voiced about the necessity of considering the self-esteem of the mentor and the part it plays in developing a sucessful mentor/beginning teacher relationship. The mentor's self-concept directly affects the teaching success of both the mentor and the mentee. This paper presents the necessary activities of the mentor/mentee relationship and intertwines the necessary conscious ventures for building a positive self-image within both mentor and mentee. Those necessary activities include allowing both parties to: (1) fulfill responsibilities intentionally; (2) provide the gift of listening; (3) develop the ability to make decisions; (4) express and accept feelings; and (5) have the freedom to grow. These activities are characteristics of a caring and nurturing relationship. In this relationship the mentor's self-esteem plays a vital role. The great potential for growth is released when educators recognize the power of a positive self-esteem. (Author/IAH)

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TITLE: REBUILDING A POSITIVE SELF-IMAGE FOR MENTOR TEACHERS

Mentoring programs designed to assist beginning teachers have become common place in today's public school. However, little has been voiced about the necessity of considering the self-esteem of the mentor and the part that concept plays in developing a successful beginning teacher relationship. The mentor's self-concept directly affects the teaching success of both the mentor and the mentee.

The paper presents the necessary activities of the mentor/mentee relationship and intertwines the necessary conscious ventures for building a positive self-image within both the mentor and mentee. Those necessary activities include allowing both parties to:

* fulfill responsibilities intentionally
* provide the gift of listening
* develop the ability to make decisions
* express and accept feelings
* have freedom to grow

The necessity of the mentoring process as being one of a caring and nurturing relationship is highlighted and documented by the paper. In this relationship the mentor's self-esteem plays a vital role. The great potential for growth is released when educators recognize the power of a positive self-esteem.

KEY WORDS:

mentor
mentee
self-esteem
self-concept
self-image

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REBUILDING A POSITIVE SELF-IMAGE FOR MENTOR TEACHERS

Over the last five years state departments of education have implemented mentoring teacher programs in an attempt to more easily integrate the beginning teacher into the school culture. Article after article has dealt with this process. How-tos and recipes are available. However, little has been written about the necessity of considering the mentor's self-esteem and the part it plays in developing a successful beginning teacher relationship. It is the authors' beliefs that how a mentor feels about him/herself directly affects the first year teaching success of the mentee.

The objectives of this paper are to present the principles for nurturing a healthy self-esteem as derived from Homer's historic epic poem, The Odyssey, to develop an appreciation for one's own worth, to emphasize the value of self-esteem, to present techniques for encouraging and contributing to other's self-esteem and their personal and social responsibility, and to emphasize the importance of building an atmosphere of trust through recognizing personal feelings and giving others permission to do the same.

The concept of mentoring originated with Homer's original epic poem, The Odyssey, in which Odysseus requests that his friend, Mentor, advise and care for his family while he is away from home fighting the Trojan War. Odysseus asks Mentor especially to guide Telemachus, his son, while he is

away. Because of Odysseus' extended 2absence, Telemachus decides to search for his father. Mentor accompanies him in his search, which through time, results in a search for Telemachus' own identity (Anderson and Shannon). The mentors in today's public schools guide the novice teachers in their searches for their own identity within the teaching profession.

The ancient story of the Mentor supports five necessary activities (Anderson and Shannon). First, the mentor fulfills responsibilities intentionally. The intentional process of mentoring leaves nothing to chance. Specific behaviors are necessary and the mentor intentionally perform these behaviors. Second, the mentor nurtures the mentee. Needs are diagnosed or recognized, usually informally, then the mentor encourages growth and development. Third, the mentor must be insightful and skillful in providing "wisdom without rebellion" (Anderson and Shannon) for both professional and personal situations. Fourth, the mentor provides a safe, supportive environment in which the mentee may learn, experiment, grow, and become inculturated into the school climate. And, last, the story of Mentor through the character of Athene, Goddess of Wisdom, teaches the importance of modeling. The mentor, a master teacher respected by colleagues, administrators, and parents alike, provides a standard by which professionalism can be measured.

Mentoring requires certain qualities, the most important of which is a positive self-esteem evidenced by a positive attitude (California Task Force). One cannot give away anything not possessed, therefore a positive self-esteem of the mentee cannot be encouraged if the mentor does not have a positive self-esteem. Before he/she can help another person build a positive self-esteem, a mentor must honestly look at self, analyzing personal attitudes and feelings.

There are ten gifts available only through a positive self-esteem (Bissell), which mentors must possess and, in turn, give to the mentee. The first of these gifts is that of a good name. The mentor must inform the mentee of the positive behaviors needed to mold a professional educator. Sometimes teachers feel apologetic about their profession. Both individuals must exhibit pride in their chosen field. The mentor must also remember that the mentee is unique, that there is no one else in the world exactly like him or her. That is the way it should be. The mentee must develop his or her own identity and not be merely a clone of the mentor. Once this quality is recognized and accepted, the mentor will concentrate on the positive qualities brought to the teaching profession by the mentee rather than trying to concentrate on qualities not evident. The mentee' rich personality should be encouraged to come through.

Second, the mentor must give the gift of listening, a very powerful gift, capable of changing behaviors.

Listening tells persons they are worthy of attention (Thies-Sprinthall). Listening does not come natural. It is a skill to be learned through practice. Qualities of listening include making eye contact, correlating body language with verbal message, setting time limits, giving empathetic feedback, respecting comfort zones, don't interrupt, and giving the speaker a chance to respond to the listener's reply.

Teacher as decision maker is also a concept to consider. The mentor must provide a safe, secure environment in which the mentee can make a decision without the fear of negative consequences afforded by a seemingly poor decision. Only by participating in decision-making does one learn to be a decision-maker.

The mentor, knowing the rules and expectations of the school community, has the responsibility of sharing that information with the mentee. This gift of knowledge of rules and expectations lets the mentee set the parameters within which he/she will work (Varah, Theune, and Parker).

Fourth, the mentor must allow the mentee to have and express feelings. When feelings are stifled, they do not serve as a positive growth element.

In today's world adults seem not to know when to use touch for encouragement. Hugs, however, have been shown to be positive motivators. The mentor needs to inform the mentee that touch is okay, and that they will be shared to build a relationship, to encourage the mentee, and to heal

hurts. Strong relationships can only be built through reaching out to one another and touching other's lives.

Laughter is good medicine for whatever ails us. Appropriate humor affirms behaviors and gives power to the performer. The mentor should laugh and help others to experience humor and laughter.

Eighth, the mentor gives permission for the mentee to make mistakes. By modeling the ability to admit mistakes and deal with their consequences, the mentor is also able to correct wrongs. The mentee observes and discusses the mentor's behaviors under stressful circumstances. Learning from failure is a valuable lesson for all to learn.

Because one of the mentor roles is to provide the mentee with growth opportunities, the mentor talks straight giving suggestions when necessary. Yet, there are times when the mentee feels stressed that the mentor will need to offer support. To give the mentee correct messages, the mentor talks straight by being sure that words, voice tone, and body language communicate the same message.

Before mentors can encourage mentees to have feelings, they must realize that feelings happen, however reactions can be controlled. Recognizing that changes come slowly, mentors practice control of reactions. They must practice turning attention to their own feelings in all parts of the body. If inner criticisms surface, they must be set aside. The body and mind will experience sensations which demand attention, yet should be separated from having to attend

them. The mentor may feel a need to express feelings, yet must decide whether action should be taken now or later. To assist the mentee in becoming a whole person, the mentor must grow in the capacity to express true feelings immediately, authentically, and without manipulation of others. "I" messages are useful for expressing personal feelings without imposing feelings and reactions on others. The mentor honors true feelings by recognizing the fact that being authentic enriches our being.

Last, and perhaps the most important gifts of all, is the freedom to do what one must do. Freedom to make decisions and grow is possible only when the mentor gets out of the way and allows the mentee to have the opportunity to do what the mentee feels is appropriate. The protective freedom provides an environment for the mentee to problem solve, cope with life creatively and offers hope for improvement (Gehrke).

This article establishes the necessity of the mentoring process being one of a caring and nurturing relationship. In this relationship the mentor's self-esteem plays a tremendously important part in encouraging, informing, supporting, and coaching the mentee. Integrating the beginning teacher into the school culture requires knowledge and skills in communication, dealing with people, and conflict management, however these abilities find their maximum worth when coupled with a genuine concern for others, a concern made possible when one feels good about

oneself. When one recognizes the potential of self-esteem which lies within the individual, great power for growth is released.

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